

Budget Testimony 2022: Children's Integrated Services

Good evening. My name is Heather Wilson. I live in St. Albans City and work for the Parent Child Center of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services. I am here to speak on the budget for Children's Integrated Services (CIS), which will need an increase of \$1.8 million to bring it to \$13.3 million for FY23. We are also seeking a one-time investment of federal pandemic relief funds of roughly \$1.6 million for a statewide data reporting platform.

Children's Integrated Services is a system of care for Vermont's early childhood population (pregnancy to a child's sixth birthday). CIS provides essential and federally mandated services, impacting families as early as possible to improve their outcomes. This includes home visiting nurses and family support specialists, mental health clinicians, childcare coordinators, and special education services. Services are more important than ever with increased rates of child welfare involvement, poverty, homelessness, housing instability, and increased mental health needs.

While Vermont provided an increase to our budget for FY22, analysis shows that our services remain underfunded. Our current case rate per member/per month should increase to \$700, factoring the actual cost of service provision and inflation. Financially backing the true cost of CIS will allow us to do the following: address our staffing crisis related to burnout and low wages, reduce or eliminate wait times, increase hours of care, obtain needed yet costly training, and remove the burden of tedious data collection and reporting.

Please consider our request to strengthen CIS, which is an investment in the outcomes of Vermonters. Increase the CIS budget to \$13.3 million and allocate \$1.6 million of federal pandemic funds for our statewide data reporting platform.

Thank you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heather Wilson